

Testimony of Victor Jorge - Fatherhood Initiative

Prepared for the Appropriations Committee

Public Hearing – February 22, 2013

Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget

To Senator Harp and Representative Walker,

Hello. My name is Victor Jorge. I'm here to ask you to reinstate the funding for the John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative for \$500,000.

I am the proud father of four, and have had sole custody of three of my children. I've been involved with the Fatherhood Initiative since October 26th, 2012. I came to the Fatherhood Initiative for help after being released from prison. I was there serving a sentence for Possession with Intent to Sell. At the time, I had sole custody of my then 5 year old daughter, so DCF removed her from my care. I was lucky enough to have my sister step in and become my daughter's foster parent, and maintain contact with her for my 22 months of incarceration.

When I was still incarcerated but in a work release program, I tried to engage with DCF as much as I could, knowing that I needed to show them that I was a good father, even though I had made some mistakes in the past. In working with DCF I asked what steps I needed to take to be re-unified and get my daughter back into my custody. My worker made it clear to me that it was a requirement that I attend the Fatherhood Initiative Program before any reunification could happen. I want to make this part clear. My State of Connecticut employed worker told me that I needed to go to Madonna Place, a nonprofit, and attend the Fatherhood Initiative Program in order to have my family be together. I have done just that and I have graduated and I continue to utilize the program

Without the Fatherhood Initiative I wouldn't be nearly as far along as I am now. It showed me how to stay focused on what I need to. To set specific goals as a father with clear plans on how to reach them. It provided the space to talk openly and freely, to think things through out loud. It is a space not just for the program directors to teach, but for all of the fathers to see that they are not alone. A space for fathers to become more open and subjective to ideas presented to them.

I am now working with DCF and am on track to be the sole caretaker for my daughter, thanks to the help and structure that the Fatherhood Initiative has provided. I was able to spend my daughters 6th birthday with her last Sunday. Without the Fatherhood Initiative Program, I wouldn't have progressed far enough in the Department of Children and Families eyes to have been there. I don't know how many of you remember your 6th birthday, but I will always remember my daughters.

Don't cut the funds that makes this work possible. Reinstate the \$500,000 in funding. I want to be able to come back to the Fatherhood Initiative to share my success story. I want other fathers to be able to see where I have come from and what I have accomplished and to have that give them hope. We need the Fatherhood Initiative for this to happen. We need places like Madonna Place. Please, reinstate the funding.